

ECRP III

European Collaborative Research Projects

**The Politics of Attention:
West European Politics
in Times of Change**



ECRP stands for European Collaborative Research Projects in the Social Sciences.

The ECRP Programme is designed to advance international research collaboration in the social sciences by encouraging European academic networking and pooling of research expertise. The Programme offers an opportunity to carry out problem-driven multilateral projects on any topic within the Social Sciences that demonstrates an international framework for research collaboration. Projects need not be exclusively European in their topic focus.

- ECRP is part of the EUROCORES Scheme that provides a flexible framework to support top class European research in and across all scientific areas.
- Research funding is provided by participating national research funding and research performing agencies.
- The European Science Foundation provides the Programme coordination and supports scientific networking of funded scientists in different EUROCORES ECRP Programmes.
- EUROCORES ECRP funds research in the social sciences that is only of the highest quality, is innovative and collaborative.

The Politics of Attention: West European Politics in Times of Change

The two central objectives of the international project on the politics of attention in Western European political systems are to develop a new theoretical perspective on the origin of issues to which government pays attention, and to establish a unique data source for studying politics in Western European countries. In accomplishing these objectives we aim to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how policy agenda setting dynamics are influenced by the nature of the issue, voters, the media, and political parties. We will inevitably expand and therefore strengthen the comparative elements of research on policy agendas, which has hitherto been largely driven by our associates in the US policy agendas project.

Our project utilises a comparative agendas coding scheme to yield statistically analysable, cross-national and cross-temporal comparative data on the policy agenda of legislative bills, parliamentary questions, governments, parties, budgets, and the media in Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK between 1978 and 2008. This coding scheme is fully compatible with the US agenda project (www.policyagendas.org) and other similar projects studying Denmark, the European Union, France, Italy, and the Netherlands.



Debate 2006 at the WOOD TV 8 studios
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This project contributes a hitherto unavailable data source on the policy priorities of political actors across an institutionally, socially, and historically diverse set of European political systems, across a time period that has seen the decline of class-based voting, old party organisations, the rise of new media and, most obviously, the growth of the European Union. These changes raise crucial questions about representation, policy convergence, and the way democracy works, and it is to answering these questions that our project hopes to make its most valuable contributions.

Project Website:

<http://sites.google.com/a/legsim.org/comparative-agendas-project/>

Project Stages

Phase 1: Development of a Comparative Coding Scheme

To generate our data measuring issue attention across agendas, we use a coding scheme that applies one of over 200 unique codes identifying the issue addressed within each bill, budget item, party manifesto quasi-sentence, media article, etc. The total number of times a code appears as a percentage of the total provides a measure of the attention given to each of over 200 issues over time in each agenda. In order to ensure comparability of our data a common codebook that is suitable for all political environments studied has been developed. Furthermore, the greater importance of international and European community related issues in Western Europe required paying especially careful attention to ensuring that more detailed data on these issues would still be compatible with previous projects on the politics of issue attention.

Phase 2: Generalisation of the Coding Scheme for Media Coding

Coding the media is a major contribution of our project, but one that presents unique challenges when using a coding scheme designed to gather information on issues that explicitly deal with government policy-making. We are developing a codebook that addresses these challenges, in addition to adding indicators of tone, actors, and the explicitly political nature of the stories reported.

Phase 3: Data Collection

With the scheme for coding the salience of different issues, each of our national teams content-analyses relevant records of the various political agendas studied, and uploads the data using a custom-built online coding interface, which deposits the data in a central database. All teams will have nearly instantaneous access to other teams' data.

Phase 4: Data Analysis

When data collection is completed teams will both attempt to replicate previous findings on the dynamics of issue attention from previous single country studies. Most important, we will extend these arguments, and pursue new theoretical avenues that address the cross-national and cross-time issues we expect to identify. Further, we will use these data to complete each participating team's individual projects (see following section).

Phase 5: Dissemination of Data and Findings

With the previous project phases completed, relevant findings stressing the comparative power of the data will be published together in a book, and the dataset made publicly available via our website. Findings will also be disseminated through scientific journals, edited volumes, and the project website.

Participants

Belgium – University of Antwerp

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Stefaan Walgrave is Professor of Political Science at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). His research focuses on political communication and on social movements and protest. Within political communication, he directed an earlier agenda-setting project in Belgium covering the period 1991-2000. He has mainly done work on the political agenda-setting power of the media and on how political parties interact with mass media and has published on these topics in journals like *Journal of Communication*, *Political Communication*, *Journal of European Public Policy* and *Comparative Political Studies*.
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Tobias Van Assche is a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Political Science at the University of Antwerp. He received his PhD from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, USA. He is interested in the effect the media has on other political actors. Tobias is also interested in political leadership and foreign policy decision making.
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Brandon Zicha is a PhD student in political communication and researcher at the University of Antwerp, Belgium as well as a PhD candidate in political science at Binghamton University (SUNY), USA. His research focuses on policy representation, political parties, and constitutional design in advanced industrial democracies. His dissertations address the speed with which policy changes are made in different constitutional and party systems.
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Laura Chaqués is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Barcelona. She has a PhD in political economy (University of Barcelona) and a Master’s degree in political science (New School for Social Research, New York). At present her main topics of study are the dynamics of agenda setting, policy networks and global public policy. She has published the book “Redes de Políticas Públicas” (Cis 2004) and several articles in national and international journals. She is the Director of the Spanish Policy Agendas Project, and she is also involved in the Morality Politics project directed by C. Green-Pedersen (University of Aarhus).
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Anna Palau is a lecturer in political science at the University of Barcelona. She has just finished her PhD dissertation on food safety policy (University of Barcelona) and holds a Master’s degree in political science (University of Sussex, 2005 with honours). Her main topics of research are the dynamics of agenda setting, and relations between state and societal actors, especially in issues related to

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Frédéric Varone is full Professor of Political Science at the University of Geneva. He taught previously at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium, 1999-2005). He received his PhD in 1998 from the University of Bern. His current research interests include comparative public policy (e.g. sustainable management of natural resources, regulation of biotechnologies), programme evaluation (e.g. qualitative comparative analysis, institutionalization of policy evaluation) and public sector reforms (e.g. New Public Management, liberalisation and privatisation of public services). He has recently published scientific articles in the *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Governance*, *European Journal of Political Research* and *Journal of Public Policy*.

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Isabelle Engeli is Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute, Florence. She was previously a lecturer at the Department of Political Science of the University of Geneva. Her current research focuses on comparative public policy, morality politics (such as abortion, new reproductive technology and stem-cell research, euthanasia), gender dynamics in the electoral process and gender gap in political attitudes and turnout. In addition, she has a strong interest in comparative research design and methodology. Besides her PhD dissertation, Isabelle Engeli has recently co-edited a book on gender and public policy. Her work has been published in *Comparative European Politics*, *Swiss Political Science Review* and in various books.

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Roy Gava is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Geneva. He holds a Degree (2007) and a Master of Arts (2008) in Political Science and is a teaching assistant in comparative politics. His main research interests are the internationalisation of public policy and decision-making processes of Western European countries in comparative perspective.

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Dr. Peter John

Peter John is the Hallsworth Chair of Governance and Co-Director of the Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG), University of Manchester. He has held posts at Birkbeck College, University of Southampton, Keele University and the Policy Studies Institute. Peter John's main research

interests are urban/local politics, both UK and comparative; public policy; participation and civic engagement; and field experiments. He is author of "Analysing Public Policy" (1998), being revised for a second edition. He has recently worked on a project on urban agendas and on "The Policy Priorities of UK Governments" which has coded Queen's Speeches since 1945.

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Dr. Will Jennings

Will Jennings is ESRC / Hallsworth Research Fellow at the University of Manchester, and a Research Associate at the ESRC Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Will Jennings' research interests include responsiveness of government to public opinion, agenda-setting, blame avoidance and blame management by public officeholders and the politics and management of risk in mega-projects and mega-events, such as the Millennium Dome and London 2012. He also holds a two-year ESRC Research Fellowship for his research into the Olympics and risk, titled "Going for Gold: The Olympics, Risk and Risk Management" (ESRC Reference: RES-063-27-0205)

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Darren Halpin is Reader in the Department of Public Policy at the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. His research interests include issues related to political representation and organised interest mobilisation, comparative public policy (particularly in rural or agricultural policy areas), and the analysis of interest group organisations. Currently he holds a ESRC Research Grant mapping policy activity across 25 years of Scottish Public Consultations: "The



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mobilisation of organised interests in policy making: Access activity and bias in the 'group system'" (ESRC Reference: RES-000-22-1932), and a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship investigating the historical evolution of UK interest groups: "Interest Group Organizations: A case-study analysis".

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Shaun Bevan is a Research Associate at the Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG), University of Manchester, and a senior graduate student at The Pennsylvania State University. His research interests include interest groups, agenda-setting, and political methodology with a focus on time series and survival analysis techniques. Shaun's dissertation investigates the life cycle of voluntary associations in the United States, studying what affects their populations, birth rates, and death rates.

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Individual Projects within

Associated Partners

United States

Professor Frank Baumgartner

Frank Baumgartner is the Miller-LaVigne Professor of Political Science at Penn State University (USA). With Bryan Jones he created the Policy Agendas Project (www.policyagendas.org) and he remains co-director. He is the author of several books in the areas of public policy, agenda-setting, and interest groups, including “Agendas and Instability in American Politics” (1993) and “The Politics of Attention” (2005) as well as numerous articles in journals such as the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Politics*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, and *West European Politics*.
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France

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Emiliano Grossman is a Senior Research Fellow at Sciences Po (CEVIPOF) and an Associate Professor at the Institut d'études politiques de Paris, where he is in charge of the European Studies Graduate Programme. His research concentrates on comparative political institutions and comparative political economy. He is currently studying financial liberalisation in a comparative perspective and the evolution of policy agendas under the French Fifth Republic. He has recently edited a special issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy* on “France and the EU after the referendum” and published “Les systèmes politiques de l'Union européenne” (De Boeck 2007, with Nicolas Sauger).
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Project 1: The Media in Comparative Perspective (FWO)

Western countries' politics have endured a changing role of the mass media over the past 30 years. In particular the depoliticisation of media has contributed to the fragmentation of West European politics. However, conflict remains about what independent role, if any, the mass media play in contributing to the political agenda or how this role has changed over time. In an effort to contribute to this discussion this project focuses on comparing the impact of the media on the political agenda in different countries, and brings the changing political and media system features to the heart of the research design. By combining the temporally-dense data collected by participating countries about the day-to-day evolution of the political agenda of actors and institutions central to policy making, and the day-to-day evolution of the media agenda, we will utilize the unprecedented opportunity to uncover the direction of influence between media and politics, and the manner in which the role of the media has changed.

Project 2: Agenda Setting in Switzerland: Impacts of the European Union and Direct Democracy (SNF)

The Swiss policy agenda is special in the European context given that it is not a member of the European Union and that its system delegates a larger portion of policy control to referenda than other Western democracies. This project assesses just how special Switzerland really is, by comparing the influence of the European Union on the Swiss policy agenda vis-à-vis other EU members. Preliminary evidence suggests a larger role for the EU in the Swiss agenda than conventional wisdom might suggest. We also evaluate the

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arguments about the role of referenda on the political agenda and policy change. Are referenda just another veto point, stymieing policy evolution or is it a dynamic laboratory of new policy ideas, providing a venue for policy entrepreneurs?

Project 3: Legislative Policy Agendas in the UK (ESRC)

This project aims to describe and analyse policy attention in the UK, with specific focus on legislative arenas. It develops a unique and comparable dataset based on the coding of legislation and prime ministers' questions, which will be analysed using a range of statistical techniques and through comparisons with equivalent data from other countries in Western Europe. The project seeks to integrate national level analysis in the UK with sub-national analysis in Scotland. As well as describing and comparing attention to policy, we are interested in measuring the influence of the public on the policy-making process and in finding out whether a change in public opinion leads to a shift in the agenda. We will consider the positive and negative feedback mechanisms that are inherent in government responsiveness and report on punctuated equilibria in the attention of government to multiple issues.

Project 4: Agenda Setting in a Transforming Spain (Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación)

The Spanish political system has experienced radical political, social and economic changes in the last three decades. With Franco's death in 1975 the late 1970s saw the Spanish political system begin its transformation from a centralized new democracy to a stable multi-level system of government with few



Impression captured during the session 'BBC World Debate: Climate Change' at the Annual Meeting 2007 of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, January 26, 2007
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peculiarities separating it from other European democracies. This project focuses on how issue prioritisation and policy dynamics have developed during this transformational period. One of the main goals is to give an explanation of how and why variations in the list of problems that are objects of public attention occur and to test the punctuated equilibrium hypothesis of policy change. Thus, this project assesses the quality of representation with growing decentralisation of government and the extent of convergence with other countries as Spain has transformed.

The aim of the European Collaborative Research (EUROCORES) Scheme is to enable researchers in different European countries to develop collaboration and scientific synergy in areas where European scale and scope are required to reach the critical mass necessary for top class science in a global context.

The scheme provides a flexible framework which allows national basic research funding and performing organisations to join forces to support excellent European research in and across all scientific areas.

Until the end of 2008, scientific coordination and networking was funded through the EC FP6 Programme, under contract no. ERAS-CT-2003-980409. As of 2009, the National Funding Organisations provide the funding for the scientific coordination and networking in addition to the research funding.

www.esf.org/eurocores

THE FOLLOWING NATIONAL FUNDING ORGANISATIONS SUPPORT THE ECRP SCHEME:

Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung (FWF)

Austrian Science Research Fund, Austria

Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen (FWO)

Research Foundation Flanders, Belgium

Research Promotion Foundation (RPF), Cyprus

Grantová agentura České republiky (GAČR)

Czech Science Foundation, Czech Republic

Forsknings- og Innovationsstyrelsen (FIST)

Danish Agency for Science Technology and Innovation, Denmark

Suomen Akatemia/Finlands Akademi (AKA)

Academy of Finland, Finland

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS)

National Centre for Scientific Research, France

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)

German Research Foundation, Germany

The Icelandic Centre for Research (RANNÍS),

Iceland

Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS), Ireland

Fonds National de la Recherche (FNR)

National Research Fund, Luxembourg

Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO)

Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, Netherlands

Norges Forskningsråd (NF)

Research Council of Norway, Norway

Polska Akademia Nauk (PAN)

Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

Ministry of Scientific Research and Information Technology, Poland

Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (MICINN)

Ministry of Science and Innovation, Spain

Forskningsrådet för arbetsliv och socialvetenskap (FAS)

Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research, Sweden

Vetenskapsrådet (VR)

Swedish Research Council, Sweden

Schweizerischer Nationalfonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung (SNF)

Swiss National Science Foundation, Switzerland

Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu (TÜBİTAK)

The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, Turkey

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

United Kingdom

European Collaborative Research Projects (ECRP) and the ESF Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS)

The ECRP Scheme is supported by the Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS) which is chaired by Professor Sir Roderick Floud (Professor Emeritus of London Metropolitan University); the Committee is composed of its members, leading scientists nominated by the ESF Member Organisations (research councils or academies) working in social sciences, and observers from other social science institutions. Along with national experts several observers from key social science institutions are also participating in two plenary meetings per year helping to shape the SCSS' role in the European Research Area.

The task of the committee is to advance Social Sciences on a European level by supporting innovative research ideas and approaches from the scientific community. Scientific agenda setting is therefore a crucial element of Standing Committee work.

The social sciences encompass a range of disciplines that aim to examine and explain human functioning on a variety of interlocking levels, ranging from neural foundations to individual behaviour, group processes and the functioning of entire societies. Consequently, the social sciences employ a wide variety of methods which address the different levels of analyses that are necessary. Whilst the methods are contrasting, they have been tailor-made to be scientifically rigorous, and to ensure that reliable knowledge is secured.

Against this background, the SCSS funds and develops initiatives in the fields of psychology and the cognitive sciences, pedagogic and education research, social anthropology, sociology and gender studies, economics, business and administrative sciences, geography, demography, environmental sciences, law, political sciences, communication sciences, international relations, social statistics and informatics.

For more information go to:

www.esf.org/scss



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The European Science Foundation (ESF) provides a platform for its Member Organisations to advance science and explore new directions for research at the European level.

Established in 1974 as an independent non-governmental organisation, the ESF currently serves 80 Member Organisations across 30 countries.

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